

THE ROLE OF PALM OIL WORKERS IN ENSURING LIVELIHOOD SECURITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON WELFARE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PLANTATION SECTOR

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Abstract

This study examines the role of palm oil workers in ensuring livelihoods and socio-economic resilience through a literature review focusing on aspects of welfare, social justice, and sustainable development in the palm oil plantation sector. This study highlights the importance of welfare, including decent income, access to social services, and protection of workers' rights as the main foundations for strengthening socio-economic resilience. Furthermore, this study emphasises the role of social justice in ensuring the fair distribution of benefits and opportunities, as well as the need for environmentally conscious plantation management to support sustainable development and ecosystem balance. Through a holistic and participatory approach, this study concludes that strengthening the active role of the palm oil worker community is vital to creating an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable plantation industry for the sake of the sustainability of life and the environment for future generations.

Keywords: palm oil workers, welfare, social justice, sustainable development, socio-economic resilience, plantation sector.

Introduction

In an era of globalisation and rapid economic development, the palm oil plantation sector plays an important role in the national and international economy. This commodity is not only a major source of state revenue, but also absorbs a significant amount of labour from plantation communities, especially in rural areas (Rahmawati, 2023) . The success of this sector is highly dependent on the sustainability of the

production process and the management of the human resources involved, especially the palm oil workers.

Palm oil workers, as an integral part of the plantation industry value chain, have a strategic role in ensuring the productive and sustainable operational continuity of plantations. They not only contribute in terms of labour, but also as part of a community that needs protection of their social and economic rights in order to remain able to actively participate in sustainable development (Aliansi Lintas Sektor, 2023) . The livelihoods of palm oil workers cannot be separated from welfare indicators that cover economic, social and environmental aspects. This welfare is the main benchmark in assessing social and economic sustainability in the palm oil plantation sector, which is also an important indicator in measuring social justice and the success of sustainable development (Yulianto, 2005) .

Social justice in this context demands the fair distribution of benefits, including access to education, health services, and protection against injustice in the workplace and in the communities surrounding the plantations. In practice, inequality and injustice often occur as a result of the uneven distribution of resources and unfair treatment of workers in various aspects of social and economic life (Urugo et al., 2024) .

In terms of sustainable development, the palm oil working community plays a role as an agent in creating harmony between economic activities and environmental preservation as well as social improvement. The implementation of sustainable principles in plantation management is an important step in maintaining environmental carrying capacity while ensuring sustainable economic benefits for the community (Shehu, 2023) . In addition, social aspects are also a key foundation for sustainable development, where the protection of workers' rights and the strengthening of local communities are an integral part of these efforts. Capacity building for workers through education and training is a key strategy in improving their quality of life and strengthening socio-economic resilience (Hendrawan, 2024) .

In the Indonesian context, the palm oil sector faces various challenges such as social inequality, land conflicts, and environmental issues, all of which impact the livelihoods and resilience of the working community. Therefore, this study is important to identify the factors that influence the welfare and social justice of the working community, as well as to strengthen their role in sustainable and inclusive development (Ngan, 2022) . This research also aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how palm oil worker communities can become the main driving force in maintaining their own social and economic sustainability, while supporting the sustainability of the national plantation industry. Thus, ultimately, a plantation ecosystem will be created that is not only economically productive, but also socially just and environmentally friendly.

In the context of sustainable development, the role of palm oil workers must be viewed holistically, encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects simultaneously. This is important so that development is not only short-term but can

provide sustainable benefits for future generations (Krishna, 2022) . By deeply understanding the role of the working community within the framework of sustainable development, it is hoped that strategies and policies can be formulated that strengthen the position of workers and ensure they receive fair and decent benefits. Empowering the working community is the key to strengthening social and economic resilience in the future.

Research Method

The research method used is a literature review with a systematic qualitative approach, in which the researcher collects, reviews, and analyses various academic literature, policy reports, and relevant sources related to the role of the palm oil working community in the context of welfare, social justice, and sustainable development in the plantation sector (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025) . The data and information obtained will be processed descriptively and thematically to identify patterns, concepts, and relationships between variables that are the focus of the study, while also revealing the challenges and opportunities in ensuring the survival and socio-economic resilience of this group of workers. This approach allows for the development of a comprehensive understanding that can form the basis for strategic recommendations and further research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016) .

Results and Discussion

Welfare and Social Justice for Palm Oil Workers

Social welfare is one of the main indicators for assessing the quality of life of palm oil workers. In this context, welfare is not only measured from an economic perspective, such as income or wages, but also includes social and psychological dimensions that affect overall quality of life. Palm oil workers often face challenges in achieving this welfare due to various structural and cultural factors in the plantation sector (Aditiya, 2024) .

Economic aspects are central to discussions on the welfare of palm oil workers, where income levels and job stability are key determinants. However, the palm oil plantation sector is often criticised for wage practices that do not always reflect the workload or the need for a decent standard of living. This situation creates economic uncertainty that can threaten the livelihoods of workers and their families (Barus & Ernah, 2024) . In addition to income, access to social services such as education, health care, and housing are also important components of welfare. Palm oil workers in several regions still face limitations in accessing basic social services, which directly impacts their quality of life and opportunities to increase their capacity to actively participate in the wider community (Palm Oil Plantation Fund Management Agency (BPDP-KS), 2025) .

In this context, the role of plantation companies and the government is crucial in creating a work and social environment that supports improved welfare. Proactive policies in providing social facilities and protection to workers can significantly improve welfare conditions and reduce existing inequalities. Social justice is a central issue that cannot be separated from the discussion of welfare (Riyono, 2022) . Social justice requires the fair distribution of benefits and opportunities among all stakeholders in the palm oil sector, including the working community. Inequality is often reflected in disparities in access to education, legal protection, and rights to resources. Many palm oil workers still face structural inequalities that make it difficult for them to obtain equal employment positions or fair treatment. Discrimination based on social status, gender, or ethnicity is also still found in daily practices in some plantation environments, which exacerbates social and economic inequalities (Syaputra, 2023) .

This inequality has a significant impact on worker motivation and productivity, which ultimately also affects company performance and sustainability. Therefore, the application of social justice principles is not only important for individual workers but also for the sustainability of the industry as a whole. One aspect of social justice that has received attention is the protection of workers' rights, including the right to adequate wages, fair working hours, and safe and healthy working conditions (Lionardo, 2024) . Although there are regulations governing this, in practice there are still many violations, which cause injustice and significant social risks. Workers' organisations and trade unions play an important role in fighting for the rights and welfare of palm oil workers. They serve as a forum for collective aspirations and negotiations to minimise injustice and strengthen workers' bargaining position in industrial relations (McCarthy, 2023) .

The role of the worker community also includes joint efforts to improve capacity and quality of life through various training, education, and human resource development programmes. These initiatives can increase workers' independence and strengthen social networks that can help them face economic and social challenges. However, the challenges faced by palm oil workers do not only come from within the sector itself, but also from external factors such as commodity price fluctuations, policy changes, and environmental pressures. All these factors contribute to social and economic uncertainty that must be managed collectively through the principle of social justice (Yuslaini, 2023) .

In the context of sustainable development, the welfare and social justice of palm oil workers must be integrated with attention to environmental preservation and economic sustainability. This holistic approach requires a paradigm shift towards more humane plantation management that is responsive to the interests of all parties (Novita, 2022) .

The role of the government and other stakeholders, such as NGOs and civil society, is key in creating policies and best practices that guarantee welfare and social

justice. Cross-sector cooperation and impactful collaboration are the main strategies for overcoming these complex social problems (Santika, 2021).

Thus, strengthening the welfare and social justice of palm oil workers is not only the responsibility of individuals or companies, but a shared agenda that must be prioritised in efforts to develop a sustainable, inclusive, and fair plantation sector for all parties.

Sustainable Development and Socio-Economic Resilience in the Palm Oil Plantation Sector

Sustainable development in the palm oil plantation sector is an urgent necessity given its strategic role in the national economy and the significant challenges it faces, particularly in terms of social and environmental impacts. The concept of sustainable development emphasises a balance between economic, social and environmental aspects that are closely interrelated (D . In the context of oil palm plantations, this means managing production with a focus on improving the welfare of workers, preserving the environment and maintaining the long-term economic sustainability of the industry. Implementing sustainable development is not only an option but a necessity for this sector to survive global pressures and increasingly stringent market demands for responsible and environmentally friendly business practices (Mohamad Ivan Pebriansyah, 2025).

The socio-economic resilience of palm oil workers is an integral part of sustainable development, because without such resilience, the balance between social and economic aspects in this sector will be easily disrupted. Socio-economic resilience refers to the ability of workers to survive, adapt, and thrive in the face of various pressures and changes, such as fluctuations in palm oil prices, government policies, and climate change (Sebyar, 2023). In this context, resilience is not merely about survival, but also includes the ability to improve quality of life and reduce social and economic vulnerability through capacity building, access to resources, and social protection. Therefore, development strategies in the palm oil sector must prioritise strengthening this resilience so that workers can be part of inclusive and sustainable development (Sihombing, 2018).

One of the key pillars of sustainable development in the palm oil sector is the application of environmentally friendly principles that aim to minimise negative impacts on ecosystems while increasing land productivity. The palm oil sector is often in the spotlight due to land conversion that threatens natural habitats and biodiversity, as well as contributing to deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions (Risky Stiawan, 2018). Therefore, sustainable environmental management practices—such as the use of organic fertilisers, proper waste management, forest conservation, and agroforestry practices—must become an inherent norm in oil palm plantation activities. This approach not only preserves the ecosystem but also provides long-term benefits for

workers and surrounding communities through the provision of sustainable natural resources (Dharmawan et al., 2021) .

In addition to environmental aspects, sustainable development also depends heavily on the success of inclusive and equitable economic development. Building an inclusive economy means ensuring that all levels of the working community receive fair benefits from palm oil production, whether in the form of decent wages, access to employment opportunities , or capacity building and entrepreneurship (Tamano, 2023) . Income and opportunity inequality can hinder sustainable development because it causes social instability and reduces worker motivation and productivity. Therefore, policies are needed to facilitate the redistribution of benefits in a transparent and participatory manner, so that the working community can have a strong position in the economic structure of the plantation sector (Pasaribu, 2021) .

Strengthening human resources (HR) in the palm oil sector is also a key focus for effective sustainable development. Education and training for the working community not only improve technical skills and productivity, but also open up opportunities for more diverse and sustainable livelihoods. For example, improving skills in agroecology, small business management, or other technical skills can help workers become more independent and adaptive to market and technological changes. Investment in HR also plays a role in strengthening the social structure of worker communities, which ultimately improves their socio-economic resilience (Putra, 2023) .

Socio-economic resilience cannot be achieved without an adequate social protection system for palm oil workers. Social protection includes access to health facilities, social security, education services, and assistance in dealing with occupational risks such as accidents or job loss (Murlianti, 2022) . The existence of a comprehensive social protection system will reduce the vulnerability of the working community and provide a sense of security that allows them to focus on developing their lives and productivity. In addition, social protection also increases the sense of justice and community involvement in sustainable development, because they feel cared for and valued in the existing production system (Erwiningsih, 2023) .

The role of worker organisations and local communities is crucial in maintaining the socio-economic resilience of palm oil workers. These organisations act as mediators between workers, companies and the government to ensure that their rights are fulfilled and their aspirations are heard. Effective worker organisation can strengthen their bargaining power so that they are able to fight for better working conditions, adequate protection and fairness in profit sharing. In addition, a solid local community can function as a social network that helps community members face economic and social challenges, strengthens social cohesion, and supports sustainable development efforts (Rahutomo, 2025) .

On a broader scale, sustainable development in the palm oil sector must pay attention to aspects of transparent and participatory governance. Good governance

requires decision-making mechanisms that involve all stakeholders, from companies, workers, and surrounding communities to local and national governments. Transparency in resource management and benefit distribution is also important to avoid corrupt practices and inequalities that harm workers. A participatory governance model can create a sense of shared ownership and increase accountability, which is vital to maintaining the sustainability of development (Haryati, 2025).

Technology and innovation also play an important role in supporting sustainable development and socio-economic resilience in oil palm plantations. The use of environmentally friendly appropriate technologies, such as efficient irrigation systems, modern harvesting tools, and controlled fertilisation techniques, can increase productivity while reducing environmental impact. Innovation can also open up new opportunities for workers to develop micro and small businesses based on plantation by-products, such as waste processing or derivative products, which enrich income sources and strengthen economic resilience (Mariati, 2024).

The socio-economic resilience of palm oil workers must also be reviewed in the context of climate change and increasing environmental risks. Climate change, which causes extreme weather, changes in rainfall patterns, and decreased soil fertility, has the potential to threaten plantation productivity and community livelihoods. Adapting to these changes through risk mitigation policies, livelihood diversification, and the development of climate-resilient agricultural practices is one of the major challenges that must be addressed. Palm oil workers, as the front line in this ecosystem, need to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of adaptation strategies so that the responses taken are effective and sustainable (Wahyuni, 2023).

Policy support from the government is also crucial to the success of sustainable development and socio-economic resilience in the palm oil sector. The government needs to provide clear and effective regulations to govern sustainable practices, including taxes, incentives for conservation, and protection of workers' rights. In addition, facilitating capacity building and empowerment of workers through education, health, and social subsidy programmes is an integral part of this policy. A community- and region-based approach must also be taken so that policy interventions can be tailored to local needs and be inclusive (R).

Investment in the development of social and economic infrastructure in plantation areas is also an important factor in supporting the socio-economic resilience of the working community. Infrastructure such as roads, health facilities, schools, and access to communication technology can open up business development opportunities and improve quality of life. This is one aspect that must be considered in sustainable development plans so that the benefits of the palm oil sector can be felt more widely and evenly (Ningsih, 2020).

It is also important to recognise the role of women in the palm oil sector in sustainable development and socio-economic resilience. Women often play dual roles

as workers, homemakers and community members, so their empowerment is crucial to the sustainability of families and communities. Equal access to education, training, and labour protection for women must be a priority in order to maximise their potential and reduce gender inequality (Rahmawati, 2023).

Cross-sector collaboration between companies, governments, non-governmental organisations, and local communities is a strategic step in addressing the complexities of sustainable development in the palm oil sector. This synergy enables the exchange of knowledge, resources, and innovation that can strengthen the capacity of all parties to achieve common goals. Furthermore, effective collaboration also supports the creation of responsive, adaptive, and solution-oriented policies and practices to address the challenges faced (Cross-Sector Alliance, 2023).

The development of comprehensive and sustainable indicators and monitoring systems is crucial for measuring progress in achieving socio-economic resilience and sustainable development in the palm oil sector. These indicators must cover economic, social and environmental aspects in a balanced manner and provide a realistic picture of the conditions of the working community. With accurate and transparent data, stakeholders can evaluate and improve policies in a timely and evidence-based manner (Yulianto, 2005).

Ultimately, building the socio-economic resilience of palm oil workers through sustainable development is not an easy or short process. It requires long-term commitment, holistic policy integration, and the active participation of all stakeholders. With a strong foundation and collaborative efforts, the palm oil plantation sector can develop into an industry that is not only economically profitable but also socially just and ecologically sustainable, ensuring the livelihood of workers and surrounding communities for future generations.

Conclusion

The role of palm oil workers is crucial in ensuring livelihoods and socio-economic resilience in the plantation sector through their contributions as key producers and members of the directly affected communities. The welfare of workers depends not only on economic aspects such as income and working conditions, but also on the fulfilment of social rights, access to basic services, and respect for social justice that ensures the fair distribution of benefits and opportunities. Strengthening the position of workers in the socio-economic structure and providing adequate protection are important foundations for creating sustainable living conditions.

In the context of sustainable development, the palm oil worker community acts as an agent of change that maintains a balance between economic production and environmental preservation and strengthening social resilience. The implementation of sustainable principles at the operational and community levels can increase productivity while protecting natural resources, while the empowerment and capacity building of

workers strengthens their socio-economic resilience in the face of external challenges such as market fluctuations and climate change. Collaboration between workers, companies, governments, and civil society is key to achieving inclusive, equitable, and sustainable plantation management.

Overall, ensuring the livelihoods and socio-economic resilience of palm oil workers requires a holistic approach that integrates welfare, social justice, and sustainable development. Policies and practices that are responsive to workers' needs and attentive to the environment must be a priority in the management of the palm oil sector. Thus, it is hoped that this sector will not only be a source of economic growth, but also a vehicle for equitable welfare and environmental preservation for the sake of sustainability for future generations.

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